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ABSTRACT

Transfer from two-year colleges to senior institutions with a business administration major has become increasingly difficult in recent years. One of the prime impediments to smooth articulation has been the accreditation standards of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). The AACSB assumes that specific conditions and resource levels ensure institutional quality, though there are no empirical grounds for this assumption. Examples of some of the specific conditions which are said to produce quality include the following: (1) the school should clearly state its mission and be evaluated on the basis of it; (2) a specified number of faculty must hold doctorates; (3) the school should have a "critical mass" of faculty; (4) the full-time equivalent (FTE) faculty must not be less one FTE per 400 student credit hours taught per term for the undergraduate program; (5) the full-time faculty must be at least 75% of the FTE required; (6) faculty members should not teach more than 12 credit hours per week, have more than three preparations per week, nor teach in more than two fields; and (7) an undergraduate school of business should concentrate its professional courses in the last 2 years of a 4-year program and should only offer a limited amount of work below the junior year. This paper analyzes each of these criteria, and concludes that the restrictive prescriptions which hinder transfer are ultimately based on accreditation standards which hardly ensure student attainment and neither specify nor verify outcomes. (EJV)

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Paper presented at the
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In a Position to Judge:
The AACSB and the Issue of Business Administration Transfer

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A Paper Presented at the American Accounting Association
1987 Annual Meeting, August 7, 1987, Cincinnati, Ohio

Transfer from community and junior colleges to senior institutions in business administration has become increasingly difficult in recent years. A prime impediment to smooth articulation has been the accreditation standards of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business and the application of those standards to relations between upper and lower division programs. However, while the standards have been given voice by the AACSB, the ultimate authors of restrictive transfer policy have been the AACSB's membership, the business schools which the AACSB represents and which have found in accreditation an effective device with which to cultivate institutional resources and to ensure stable enrollments. In brief, it is the contention here that beneath all the arguments over proper pedagogy, the transfer problem reduces to an intersectional conflict over mission and to the reluctance of schools of business at senior institutions to accord community and junior colleges a major role in business administration education. The AACSB's standards and transfer prescriptions are simply convenient means of promoting the interests of one party to the dispute.

The controversy over transfer in business education necessarily centers on the method of quality assurance chosen by many four-year business programs. Any analysis of the controversy must examine the business school accreditation process which forms the basis for the restrictive transfer prescriptions. The claim is that accreditation by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business safeguards quality in business education. Actually, accreditation by the AACSB is simply another layer of exactly the same sort of quality assurance already available in regional accreditation. By requiring that community college students who transfer to senior programs have their educational attainments "verified," senior institutions are implying that the educational warranties of the regional accrediting bodies are subject to question. If indeed they are, then more of exactly the same kind of quality assurance is hardly an improvement. The real issue to be addressed is institutional accountability: How does an outsider know that a school is really performing its function? Accreditation is the most common means of answering this question. But accreditation, whether by a regional body or by the AACSB, provides only indirect answers and as an instrument of quality assurance is open to significant criticism because its evaluative criteria do not relate to student achievement and because the process fails to make quality distinctions among institutions. Moreover, these are only the most apparent limitations of the accreditation process.

All forms of accreditation are open to additional criticism because of the basic nature of the accrediting model. For one thing, the process is susceptible to compromise by the professional entanglements of the accreditors. It is worth remembering that the reviewers and the reviewed are all players in the same game, separated in the same way as today is from tomorrow. For another, accreditation itself is but one half of a true

input/output accountability model. An ideal model would look first at the components of educational service, the so-called inputs to schools (factors such as stated goals, number of faculty, number of faculty with doctorates, number of books in the library, average class size, available computer time, floor space, and the like) and then at the results of the process, i.e., the changes which occur in students (achievement, the development of competencies, improved values). An ideal model would estimate "value-added," would indicate how the system produced those outcomes, and would provide feedback to instructors and to institutions. But accreditation only looks at inputs, the conditions which ought to foster learning. It does not examine outcomes in order to confirm that resources have been used effectively. It is in this basic sense that accreditation from a regional association and from the AACSB amount to exactly the same thing, with only the name of the warrantor changed in the case of the programmatic review. Both processes involve self-study and visitation. Both processes look at institutional goals and the resources at hand to achieve those goals. Both processes stipulate evaluative criteria and issue warranties on the basis of identical assumptions. However, neither process approaches the ideal and attests to outcomes. Therefore, neither process amounts to real accountability and, in fact, all of the reasons which the AACSB cites for requiring validation of learning for transfers could be applied to students at senior institutions accredited by the AACSB if anyone wanted to insist on real accountability. Indeed, the poverty of the AACSB's position on business education transfer becomes increasingly apparent as one looks deeper into its role as an instrument of quality assurance and as a defender of the educational status quo.

AACSB Accreditation: An Analysis

The heart of the AACSB accreditation process is contained in "Accreditation Standards and Guidelines for Business Administration Programs," a statement most recently revised in April of 1985. Under "Standards and Guidelines," the purpose of accreditation is said to be the fostering of "high quality in education for business administration."[1] The statement then sets forth eight accreditation criteria which must be met by institutions seeking the Assembly's warranty.

1. Mission and Objectives: The school must clearly state its mission and establish orderly methods for achieving that mission.[2]

2. Admission of Students: Admission policy for high school and transfer students must be clearly stated and, together with retention standards, must compare favorably with those of the institution as a whole.[3]

3. Personnel: The school must possess academic and support personnel of sufficient quality and in sufficient quantity to foster overall high quality.[4]

4. Curriculum: The school's curriculum must prepare students broadly for citizenship and leadership and specifically in five areas of business administration study.[5]

5. Library and Computer Resources, Facilities, and Services: The school must possess these support items in sufficient amount to meet the stated mission.[6]

6. Financial Resources, Facilities, and Equipment: The school must possess facilities suitable to the stated mission and must allocate a budget sufficient for the unit. (To determine sufficiency, "comparisons with support levels allocated to other relevant programs at the institution may be pertinent.")[7]

7. Educational Innovation and Technology: Innovation, especially that which advances quality, is encouraged.[8]

8. Maintenance of Accreditation: Member schools are expected to continue their adherence to the standards.[9]

These criteria have received very little attention in the debate over the application of AACSB guidelines to the relations between community colleges and senior institutions. It is worth noting, however, that the criteria, together with AACSB "preconditions," which are stated in the same standards publication, bear a striking resemblance to the evaluative criteria used in regional accreditation. In fact, a review of the published evaluative criteria of the commissions on higher education of the six regional accrediting associations indicates that all six stipulate at least these eight criteria, notwithstanding their differing language and unique formats. Since this is so, one might reasonably ask why schools already accredited according to these criteria would want to employ the same list again to seek a second warranty. One answer to this is obvious: self-interest. Following the same criteria in an AACSB evaluation may be redundant, but it affords member schools the opportunity of writing their own ticket. It makes eminent sense for schools of business to establish an association and to state their institutional needs as necessary conditions for the delivery of quality services in the same way as it behooves any professional organization to exclude outsiders and set its own regulations and resource requirements unilaterally. A better question for outsiders to ask is what relationship exists between the AACSB's evaluative criteria and the purported outcomes of the educational processes of AACSB member schools.

The AACSB accreditation process assumes that specific conditions and resource levels ensure institutional quality. There are no empirical grounds for this assumption, and no hypothesis tests are currently underway at AACSB member schools to examine the claim that these inputs produce quality. To say that a school of business is autonomous, has its own dean, makes certain expenditures per student, or has an established level of computer support is in no way an assurance that effective decisions are being made or that student learning will occur at specified levels. Yet, ultimately, that is what an AACSB warranty is taken by its defenders to imply. It is enlightening to examine a few examples of the specific conditions which are said to produce "quality" in order to assess the AACSB's position on transfer.

1. The school should clearly state its mission and should be evaluated on the basis of it.[10]

2. A specified number of faculty must hold doctorates.[11]

3. The school should have achieved a "critical mass" of faculty.[12]

4. The full-time equivalent faculty must be not less than the following: for the undergraduate program, one FTE per 400 student credit hours taught per term.[13]

5. The full-time faculty required must be at least 75% of the full-time equivalent faculty required.[14]

6. Faculty members should not teach more than 12 credit hours per week, have more than three preparations per week, nor teach in more than two fields.[15]

7. "An undergraduate school of business should concentrate its professional courses in the last two years of a four-year program, and should offer only a limited amount of work below the junior year."[16]

Taking these criteria in the order given,

1. Accrediting a particular institution in terms of its stated mission assumes that all applicant institutions have equally worthy purposes. The implication is that any school could be accredited without assessing the merit of its mission. The only stipulation that the AACSB adds to this criterion is that the mission must be consistent with the other inputs contained in the guidelines, including the "overall high quality embodied in the standards."[17] While this standard obviously encourages diversity, it is hardly the sort of criteria which inspires confidence, saying as it does, "Do what you want but do it well." Ironically, this is also a criterion which--with slight adjustment of another stipulation--could leave room for community college business programs if senior institutions chose to offer lower division business education.

2. Stipulating the number of faculty holding doctorates assumes a production model for higher education. Indeed, almost all of the AACSB's criteria assume such a model. In a recent treatment of accrediting practices, William E. Troutt made this point about accreditation in general, saying that accrediting bodies "generally check on the quality of the assembly line, i.e., curricula, faculty, resources, etc. The criteria assume a direct relationship exists between the quality of the assembly line and the quality of the product."[18] This is a belief congruent with the archaic state of educational research a half century ago. There are now much better mechanisms available to assess outcomes, and we no longer need rely solely on assumptions. Unless, that is, motivations other than quality assurance are paramount to the AACSB's member schools.

As for the criterion on doctorates, there is no evidence that student achievement is any higher under Ph.D.'s and DBA's than under MA's and MBA's. If the AACSB has accumulated data on the question, they ought to publish it for the benefit of the rest of higher education.

3. "Critical mass," like many other terms used by the AACSB, is sufficiently ambiguous to qualify as a "professional" term; that is, it sounds official enough to outsiders for them to leave it alone but it provides insiders with enough room to define it in any way they like.

4. The stipulation of one FTE per 400 students, together with other AACSB prescriptions on faculty workload, works out to one faculty to a little over thirty students. This ratio has a venerable tradition in education, as elucidated by Alvin Eurich in Reforming American Education.

> For many years I wondered where the idea of an ideal fixed teacher-student ratio came from. Finally, with the aid of a Talmudic scholar, I learned that in the Babylonian Talmud a rule was established by Rabbi Raba, an authoritative sage of the third century A.D.: 'Twenty-five students are to be enrolled in one class. If there are from 25 to 40, an assistant must be obtained. Above 40, two teachers are engaged.' This rule, established long before the days of printed books, understandably reflected even earlier pratices. Rigidly to accept today such a fixed ratio is like adhering to Ptolemy's theory of the universe after Einstein has introduced his theory of relativity.[19]

To address the question of ideal class size, Eurich quotes the comprehensive summary of fifty years of educational research contained in the Encyclopedia of Educational Research.

> Is there an optimum class size? ...There is nothing in evidence to suggest that large class sizes materially affected attainment in subject matter under teaching techniques considered typical at that time. Subsequent studies of the relation of class size to student attention, discipline, self-reliance, attitudes, and work habits failed to establish a research basis for decisions on class size.[20]

To their credit, AACSB has moved beyond the rigidity of the ancient rule. They do not insist on a consistent ratio. Rather, they insist on a total complement of teachers who could be equated to the ancient rule if all of them were teaching. Using this resource allocation criterion, AACSB allows business schools certain deviations:

> Qualitative attributes of personnel resources, including consideration of the process by which those resources are allocated, organized, and managed may be found to compensate for failure to achieve quantitative measures.[21]

Hocus Pocus! This provision enables faculty at AACSB schools to hold large classes so that they may teach fewer preparations, may be released from some of their sections, or may fill other special assignments, including their own research. "Thirty-to-one" is merely AACSB's means of protecting a business school's share of an institution's resources.

5. Again, 75 percent of the faculty being full-time is an idea congruent with the production model and mentality. As a stipulation, it raises many questions. How, for example, would AACSB view full-time faculty from one accredited school who teach at another? Or business school deans who teach? Or faculty whose split appointments extend into non-business fields? Indeed, exactly what the 75 percent criterion is aimed at (total workload? an individual's primary role classification? their perceived degree of commitment to a particular school?) is unclear. The most obvious interpretation, of course, relates to the effectiveness of part-time faculty. On this there is

absolutely no empirical data indicating that student achievement is higher under full-time faculty than under part-time faculty. Many part-time faculty bring with them practitioners' insights and savvy which raise educational standards and stimulate students. To dictate the percentage of part-timers which is allowable, without any evidence of their diminished effectiveness, is arbitrary and sounds more like a union's collective bargaining position than a precondition to excellence prescribed by a standards group.

6. It is assumed that faculty who teach more than 12 credits per week will be less effective. If this is so, should there not be rules against full-time faculty being allowed to teach elsewhere for fear that their effectiveness might also be diminished? Or against part-time jobs, like consulting? Or against faculty living lives which carry excessive personal demands? The limitations on three preparations and two fields are similarly arbitrary and abiguous: What is a preparation? What is a field? The implication is that a diversity of fields and preparations is time-consuming and taxing. This may very well be true. But to limit the effects of some factors but not the effects of others is inconsistent and raises serious questions about the purposes of the standards.

7. Of all the AACSB criteria, concentrating professional courses in the last two years of a four-year curriculum is the stipulation that most divides the community college sector from the business school branch of higher education. The grounds for this prescription are certainly not empirical. Rather the criterion represents a subjective judgment made in the hope that undergraduate general education programs fulfill their advertised promises. Ironically, for many students study in business administration might be more effective in developing the very attitudes and attributes commonly assumed to be outcomes of liberal arts education, namely communications and quantification skills, critical thinking, inference, judgment, appreciation of evidence, and the cultivation of research skills. Indeed, even values education can be delivered by means of a business curriculum. The point is that as lofty as have been the pronouncements of recent blue ribbon reports, the liberal arts have no monopoly on these enobling effects of higher education. They can all be delivered by courses in business administration.

Of course, the AACSB's notion of basing upper-division programs on lower division foundations does make apparent sense. What it overlooks--conveniently--is the possibility that solid foundations can be built in a variety of ways and that upper-division programs can be adapted to suit a variety of lower-division structures. Underlying this pedagogical inflexibility, however, is the AACSB's own organization foundation: the AACSB represents university-level business programs in much the same way as a trade group represents special interests. The whole point behind the AACSB's prescriptions on transfer is that it is tradition for business administration students at universities to study the liberal arts in their first two years and later to major in business administration, just like other students major in history or chemistry. Universities are organized that way. Since this model has worked for years, the AACSB and its members see no reason to change it now, especially when resources and enrollments are at stake. But community colleges have created a whole new curricular model. They have built programs on the basis of student motivation to learn skills and competencies which are related to employment opportunities and in so doing have prompted many students to enroll who would have been put off by the older university model. When many of

these students decide they would like to continue on towards four-year degrees, the AACSB labels it a problem, to be cured through better counseling and advisement. But this is a problem only in the sense that it points up the need for senior institutions to adapt their programs to serve students whose development has not been along traditional lines. The real friction between the community colleges and the schools of business stems from this source. Rather than adapt to a new type of student, the schools of business prefer to demand that the new students fit into the traditional mold. Their club in this controversy is the AACSB. In their opinion, students who might eventually transfer to schools of business ought to be identified early and put into the proper track. What this viewpoint neglects is that students might reject higher education entirely if they are forced into "proper tracks" too early.

The intention of the AACSB to preserve the status quo has prompted their creation of a whole corpus of spurious educational arguments in support of their position. But these arguments only cloud the real issue, which is that senior institutions are simply unwilling to adapt to a system of higher education which includes community colleges and the ideal of open access. The "course leveling" provision of the AACSB's Standards is crucial to this position for it offers a seemingly unassailable defense. Consider, for example, the following:

> This philosophic approach suggests that professional education in business administration and management builds upon prior knowledge of related disciplines in order to permit an appropriate combination of descriptive and analytical approaches to the study of business. Marketing, for example, when taught to students who do not have a background in disciplines (of the liberal arts) is often no more than a description of how to close a sale... On the other hand, when students are given an opportunity to acquire a prior background in fields such a psychology, sociology, statistics, and communications, then buyer behavior, sales, and consumer motivation ... become meaningful and exciting concepts, even in an introductory course.[22]

But what, exactly, should the prior background entail? AACSB makes only a general pronouncement on the requirements of the first two years. Their model curriculum stipulates twenty-seven credits in Science/Math/Behavioral Science/Humanities/Fine Arts. It also allows for electives while requiring that 40 percent of total baccalaureate coursework be in non-business subjects (Most good schools, they say, approach 50 percent.) The model curriculum offers no real guidance on what outcomes are necessary for optimum preparation for professional coursework. It is simplistic to recommend a prior background in fields such as psychology, sociology, statistics, and communications when there are a multitude of possible outcomes to such courses, many of which are parallel to the outcomes of business administration courses. If specific outcomes cannot be stated as expectations and if those outcomes cannot be shown to be unique, then what is the sense of dictating to community college students that liberal arts courses are acceptable in transfer, but business administration courses are not? Under such circumstances, reserving professional courses for the upper division amounts to a mere time requirement. Perhaps what the AACSB wants is greater student "maturity." If

that is so, consideration should be given to the kinds of students community colleges enroll, i.e., students who are typically older, working, and quite mature. Besides, if prior outcomes could be shown to foster improved achievement in professional courses, why could not the first two years contain the specified sequence? Since many community college students enroll part-time for years, there is ample time for sequenced courses in part-time programs. Part-timers take courses serially anyway. In any case, the accreditation stipulations on course levels appear arbitrary in the extreme. Or is one to believe that there are common student competencies which derive from the diversity of liberal arts courses allowable at different AACSB schools which uniformly prepare students for upper division professional study?

It should be noted that AACSB does allow for some professional courses to be taken in the lower division. In discussing its "Standard IV," the Assembly notes,

> Examples of courses which might be offered at the lower division level are: Principles of Accounting, Principles of Economics, Business Law, Statistics, and Introduction to Business. Examples of courses which should be offered only at upper division level are: Principles of Finance, Principles of Management, and Principles of Marketing.[23]

A critique of AACSB policies which was recently published by the New York Council of Two-Year College Business Faculty Administrators questioned why some professional courses (Principles of Accounting, Economics, Business Law, Statistics, and Introduction to Business) were allowed while other courses (Principles of Finance, Management, and Marketing) were not. Why only some, the New York educators asked. They continued,

> To argue the need for academic maturity in order for lower division students to be able to effectively handle those excluded courses is simply not supported by any known credible empirical evidence....To further muddy the water, the suggestion that students are sufficiently mature for foundation work at the lower division and not for the excluded principles courses...is again not supported by any compelling empirical evidence....[24]

The New York group further characterized the overall impact of AACSB accreditation as "administratively onerous and self-serving to upper level business programs."[25]

While the AACSB recommends certain courses be taught at either the lower or upper levels, they actually refer curriculum choices to their individual member schools. Each AACSB school decides at what level courses should be taught. In their statement on transfer relations, the AACSB stipulates,

> Whether or not an articulation agreement is present, the baccalaureate degree-granting institution will establish validation procedures in any instance where a course taken at the lower division level which the degree-granting institution offers at the upper division level is to be accepted for upper division credit in business, economics, or administration.[26]

In other words, if State U. offers either finance (an AACSB recommended upper level course) or business law (seemingly lower level but perhaps upper level if State U. opted to give it there), validation procedures will be in order. If they are, transfer students will be required to endure them. Validation procedures come in the form of CLEP tests, written examinations prepared by the degree-granting institution, or successful completion of advanced courses. More often than not, however, validation is in the form of an off-the-shelf final examination geared to a particular textbook, the class notes of a particular instructor, and in a format which is unfamiliar to the community college student who may have taken his/her own version of the course up to two years earlier (or longer if the student was part-time). There are, quite obviously, numerous inequities at work here but the most odious is that, under such conditions, transfer students are subjected to standards different from those applied to students who originally enroll in AACSB schools. In short, in no instance do AACSB schools require standardized demonstrations of achievement by their own students. This was noted above to be a major flaw in the accreditation procedures. But having overlooked student achievement as an indicator of institutional quality for its own members, the AACSB hesitates not at all to require achievement demonstrations by transfers.

The debate over transfer in business administration has grown in importance with the great growth in community college business enrollments and with the increasing numbers of two-year business degree graduates who decide to continue on to four-year degrees. These students deserve better than the treatment currently being accorded them by AACSB member schools. It is worth noting that the restrictive prescriptions which hinder transfer are ultimately based on accreditation standards which hardly ensure student attainment and which are redundant besides. These standards are simply statements of desirable conditions and resource levels, inputs to a weak evaluation model which never even gets around to specifying outcomes, much less regularly verifying them. Clearly, the AACSB standards are better suited to meeting the resource needs of business schools than they are to guaranteeing "quality." Indeed, nowhere does the AACSB explicitly define quality; it only insists that accredited schools must have a lot of it. And nowhere does the AACSB evaluate learning outcomes except where the standards are applied to transfer students whose achievement must be validated. Validated according to what common expectations? Do upper-division programs, one might ask, uniformly promote higher student attainment than lower-division programs? Are there variations in the level of student attainment at different AACSB accredited schools? It is time to address this issue on behalf of students who are caught in the middle. Community and junior colleges have developed responsible means for delivering business administration education. It is only through insistence on the double standard of its validation prescription (Not for us, say the four-year colleges, but for you!) that the AACSB has so far been able to deny this; and the only reason the transfer prescriptions have so far stuck is that the AACSB has been in a position to judge. Do schools of business seriously believe that there is only one way--the university model--to deliver instruction in business administration? Their own standards suggest otherwise: "To facilitate the foregoing," their standards say, "the Accreditation Council encourages continuing development and appraisal of both new and existing curricula."[27] Further on, the standards add, "In the spirit of the accreditation philosophy, a school may develop curricula somewhat at variance with the common body of knowledge when it demonstrates that overall high quality is maintained."[28] This, of course, community colleges have already done. It is time that their new model be recognized.

1. American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business. "Accreditation Council Policies, Procedures, and Standards," (1986-86). P. 19.
2. AACSB. P. 22.
3. AACSB. P. 22-23.
4. AACSB. P. 23-28.
5. AACSB. P. 28-31.
6. AACSB. P. 31.
7. AACSB. P. 31.
8. AACSB. P. 31.
9. AACSB. P. 32
10. AACSB. P. 22.
11. AACSB. P. 25-26.
12. AACSB. P. 27.
13. AACSB. P. 27.
14. AACSB. P. 27.
15. AACSB. P. 28.
16. AACSB. P. 28.
17. AACSB. P. 22.
18. Troutt, William E. "Regional Accreditation Evaluative Criteria and Quality Assurance." Journal of Higher Education (1979), Vol. 50, No. 2, P. 202-3.
19. Eurich, Alvin. Reforming American Education. New York: Harper & Row (1969), P. 4.
20. Eurich. P. 3.
21. AACSB. "Accreditation Council Policies, Procedures, and Standards." P. 24.
22. AACSB. "Statement of the AACSB Standards Committee on those Accreditation Council Standards Bearing on Junior and Community College Relations" (1978). P. 2.
23. AACSB. "Accreditation Council Policies, Procedures, and Standards. P. 29.
24. New York Council of Two-Year College Business Faculty Administrators. "A Response by the State University of New York Council of Two-Year College Business Faculty Administrators to American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business Accreditation Standards and Guidelines," (1985). P. 5.
25. New York Council of Two-Year College Business Faculty Administrators. P.1.
26. AACSB. "Statement of the AACSB Standards Committee on those Accreditation Council Standards Bearing on Junior and Community College Relations," (1978). P. 4.
27. AACSB. "Accreditation Council Policies, Procedures, and Standards." P. 28.
28. AACSB. P. 30.

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